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## JESUS AND CURRENT JUDAISM

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The subject is not Judaism in the time of Christ. That would direct our attention to facts that cannot come within the limits of this article. It might also affect our perspective; for all the material that goes into a Bible dictionary would force itself upon us. But the Judaism that here touches us is "current" or vital Judaism.

Moreover, we are not to study even this current Judaism for itself, but only so far as it bears upon the mind and work of Jesus. No creative workman in the broad field of social and religious life has ever been or ever can be a scholar in the academic sense. To him a considerable part of the knowledge that may be precious in the eyes of the trained scholar is surplusage. Now, our Lord is the supremely creative workman in that broad field. If, then, we would keep to our text, we must so handle the Judaism current in Jesus' time that, as far as it is possible, we may see things in his perspective.

Jesus was vitally related to his nation. He was at the farthest remove from the Hindu saint who, in order to perfect himself, mentally annihilates social and political relationships. On his mental side Jesus is the final flower of prophecy. The prophet was an inspired citizen who did his best thinking at the very heart of his nation. Jesus "came eating and drinking." Not on the mystic's mountain-top of vision, and not in the philosopher's study, did he think out his plan of salvation. In the deep of human fellowship it was given to him.

Jesus was in the most eager sympathy with the Jewish nation. So our primary conception, by which we are to control our material, is the national consciousness of Judaism and Christ's relation to it. And if we wish to start straight, we must forget a principle which intimately concerns our own practice, namely the distinction between church and state. Everywhere in antiquity church and state were identical; and, in one sense, this was truer in Judaism than anywhere

else. For, in spite of that magnificent idealism of prophecy which laid the foundation of a universal religion, Judaism made an inextricable confusion between the question of faith and the question of descent from Abraham. And the vast motive power of monotheism served to constitute a Jew in his patriotism the most passionately religious and in his religion the most intensely patriotic man of antiquity.

If, then, we ask what are the elements which in varying proportion entered into and constituted that patriotism which was for the Jew also religion, and that religion which was for him also patriotism, we find them in an intense confidence in a future of the nation—that is, the messianic ideal—in a reverence for the Old Testament as the authoritative revelation of the divine will, and in a powerful, even if diminishing, influence of the temple and its worship. But the patriotism of the Jew cannot be understood without taking into account also the political situation and remembering Israel's subjection to Rome. Of these four elements of the life of Judaism in Jesus' day we must take account when we consider his relation to it. In the varying influence which these elements exerted, or the varying emphasis which was put upon them, is the explanation of the factors and factions of Jewish life in the first century.

Traditional terms, however helpful, are often dangerous by reason of their mental associations. Now, when we enter on the study of our Lord's life, we are sure to say that its center is found in his dealings with the messianic ideal of his people. That is true; but, because the terms are freighted with inherited meaning, it is apt to be misleading. Let us put it as follows: Jesus came to self-knowledge and self-mastery, and so came into his saving thought of God, through his relation to and dealings with the national consciousness of Judaism. On the one hand, this consciousness manifested its power and pride under the form of an immense confidence in the nation's future. This confidence is called the messianic ideal. On the other hand, it built itself upon the Old Testament Scriptures. Consequently, Jesus' dealings with Judaism involves two things which are, in truth, two aspects of a single thing: he must settle accounts with the national hope, and he must also settle accounts with his fellow-countrymen who claimed the sovereign right of scriptural interpretation.

Jesus' privilege was to make the messianic hope inseparable from his person. His privilege gave him his task. He inherited the incomparable Scripture and the great Christ-hope. It became his task to carry the messianic ideal down to its root in the being and will of God—to ground it in the divine character, and thus to give it indestructible insurance. But this meant that he must purify it. In patriotism the noblest and basest elements of human motive are interknit. Jesus became our Savior because he purified the national hope without enfeebling it. He did not turn aside into philosophy or mysticism, but, making the supreme hope his personal possession and purifying it, he laid the foundation of the kingdom of God.

The development of Hebrew prophecy is not intelligible unless it is read in the context of universal history. The crises of world-politics attended and conditioned the turns of prophetic thought. So it was in the fulness of time. The student should keep in mind two dates of vast significance, 6 A. D. and 39 A. D. The former marks the laying of the first direct Roman tax on the Holy Land. The later denotes the proposal of Caligula to set up a statue of himself in the temple of Jerusalem. Between these dates lie the public life, the work, and the death of our Savior. What they plainly indicate is that the imperial consciousness of Rome is coming to close quarters with the national consciousness of Judaism. Vergil had put on the lips of his countrymen the noble words: "Thy calling it is, O Roman, to impose peace on the world and to put down the proud." And the prophets had taught the Jews to say: "Thou shalt suck the treasures of the gentiles, O Israel." How should the Jews and the Romans settle their accounts?

This was the situation which gave Jesus his opportunity and at the same time beset him with mortal peril. Here it is that we must place the temptation, in order to get its bearings on his plan. In the lives of great men a single experience sometimes discloses the secret of power. The temptation opens to us the very mind of Jesus. Looking forward from it, we can see his whole life-plan unfolding. The pith of the temptation was a battle between ideals, between that view of the messianic hope which controlled the Judaism of his time, and the view which alone could satisfy his own perfect nature. He was tempted to use force, and he put the temptation aside. He was

tempted to make faith in his own claims easy by the free use of miracles, and he put the temptation aside. At the same time, he took the hope of the nation for the staple of his thought. How to be true to the nation without being untrue to himself was the problem. So, from the temptation the road runs straight toward Calvary. At every step he is vitally connected with his people and deep in their debt. Yet, all the while, he far outgoes them. A Jew all over, he transcends Judaism.

In Jesus' day a new political party was born, the Zealots. They contended that to pay tribute to Cæsar was contrary to God's will. Now, at bottom this was the question which the temptation pressed on the Savior. Should he so use his miraculous power as to make himself a great popular hero? He was himself a Galilean, a peasant among peasants. The impassional desire of his countrymen came home to him with great force. He longed to lead them. But he put the use of force outside his plans. The business of his heavenly Father was to found the kingdom of God on character. Not through force, but through the power of sheer righteousness, shall the nation come to its own. Deep as was his sympathy with his fellow-countrymen, he could have nothing to do with the methods of the Zealots. He sheathed his sword and made the cross his weapon of defense. More than once the crowd desired to force his hand and make him a king (John, chap. 6). King indeed, the master of Israel's higher fortunes, he knew himself to be. But he solved the terrible problem of force which besets every people, by fully appropriating the hope of his nation, and then setting himself to realize it through sheer perfection of character.

Following the course of Jesus' own thought, we find that, when he was once outside the sphere of the peasant, he would come upon three parties, each representing a mood or aspect of Judaism. With the Sadducees he does not seem to have come into close contact till he was put upon his trial. Yet, of necessity, he often had them on his mind. For the backbone of Sadduceeism was the high-priesthood with the rich or well-to-do section of the priesthood at large. Once on a time the high-priesthood had stood for what was most representative of Judaism. This was during the period immediately after the exile. But, for many reasons, the Old Testament priesthood

could not keep pace with the advancing thought of the nation. It was a close corporation. No one could exercise the priestly function unless, to use the Roman phrase, he had a grandfather. He must be able to show a straight descent from priestly ancestors. No matter how great his religious genius, there was no door open to him. Even our Lord himself stood entirely outside the priesthood. It was, therefore, cut off, more and more, from the vital forces among the laity. Besides, as time went on and the revenues of the temple grew great, the high-priesthood came to be more interested in the maintenance of things as they were than in the hope and future of Israel. Inevitably, then, it lost the power to lead and interpret popular feeling. But it was popular feeling that Jesus aimed to win: "the common people heard him gladly." All the material of his thoughts and his prayers was taken from Israel's hope. In his sight, the only real things were the things pertaining to the moral nature of God and man. So, under the fire of piercing moral criticism, the high-priesthood, and the party that found a center in it, ceased to have an abiding value.

Going deeper into Judaism, Jesus would find a party or tendency which, one might easily suppose, would strongly appeal to him. Unlike the Sadducees, who traded largely in the things of the day, the Essenes, a monastic order, were merchants of light, dealing with the things that are eternal. They sought perfection in the ways of God by keeping themselves aloof from the contamination of the common life. But their very earnestness in dealing with the questions of the soul, by reason of the forms of expression it sought, lost all power to find Jesus and convince him. In truth, Essenism could not make any broad impression on Judaism itself, for the glory of that nation was its deep common consciousness and its tenacious national will. And if not on Judaism in general, still less on the Savior who embodied in his own person the genius and logic of prophetism. Prophetism in its essence is a moral criticism of the nation's consciousness and aims. The breast of Jesus was the battlefield between two interpretations of the nation's being and mind and hope. He and the Essenes were of a different spirit. Between them there could be no real sympathy.

We come last to the party with which our Lord was brought into unceasing contact, the Pharisees. The deepest differences are pos-

sible only between people who have much to do with one another. Jesus differed profoundly from the Pharisees because he dealt with them all his life and at every turn. In a sense he himself was a Pharisee. His family were Pharisees. The Pharisees had made themselves the pastors and preachers of Israel. After the exile there was for a period no clear distinction of tendencies. But more and more the times called for men who knew the Scriptures thoroughly, and who could, through preaching, popularize their knowledge. What the priest lost the Bible scholar gained. And at last the Bible scholar wrested from the high-priesthood the right of leadership. For the Bible was the Jew's true Holy Land. From Palestine he might be uprooted and taken away, but his Scriptures were a treasure that could not be taken from him. The temple might fall, but the Word of God was indestructible. And so, by that logic of events which is another name for the will of God, the men who best knew the Bible of Israel were bound in course of time to possess the power of the keys in vital matters. In Jesus' words, the Pharisees "sat in Moses' seat."

Furthermore, the Pharisees had no aristocratic or priestly privilege. Any Jew could become a Pharisee, and might hope to become a great Pharisee, a teacher, or rabbi. So Pharisaism opened a career to all the talents. The party stood for progress, and for advances toward democracy. Consequently, in our Lord's day, they, not the priests, were the masters in Israel. And when, in the deadly conflict with Rome, the temple went down into irreparable ruin, the Pharisees showed themselves entirely competent to organize the nation on a basis wholly independent of the temple.

Jesus, then, grew up within the Pharisees' thoughts about God and man. Ultimately he found in them his rivals (John, chap. 10), in the contest for the right to interpret the Old Testament on the one hand, and the nation's hope on the other; because, in spite of the many noble things about the Pharisees, they were quite incompetent to lead God's people on to their final goal. Judaism, as they understood it, was an imposing religious establishment with an immense contradiction at its heart. By its charter, the prophetic covenant with God, it was bound to tell the glad news of God's unity and saving purpose to all mankind. But, while the Pharisees developed

considerable missionary zeal, they were totally unable to put religion on a truly missionary basis. They made an inextricable confusion between questions of genealogy and questions of the soul, between real or imaginary blood-descent from Abraham and the spiritual nature of man.

Jesus completely transcended Pharisaism. He did it by reviving prophetism. Without turning aside into monasticism and mysticism—thus losing touch and hold on history—he so deepened and enriched the inner life that it was possible for Paul to universalize Christianity. He made character the all in all, and grounded it on the character of God. The true Israelite, like the true American, must be an impassioned lover of his nation. But if he once sets out to fulfil the promise his nation makes to humanity, he shall end by carrying the national out into the universal. For he seeks to make his own breast the sanctuary and stronghold of his neighbor's rights, his own life the insurance of the nation's hope. Sooner or later he shall find that there is but one goal for him. The hope of his nation becomes the hope of the race. Even so with the Savior. In the white light of a character in perfect keeping with the divine will, the half-values of the temple, the half-truths of the Essene and the Pharisee, pass out of sight.